A Ruling's Reach

Trace how one court decision affected citizenship and slavery's expansion.

8.C.11.2.C "Evaluate the impact of the Dred Scott v. Sandford decision, which denied citizenship to African Americans and ruled enslaved persons as property."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, underline two rulings and circle two effects of those rulings. Number one ruling 1 and its effect 2 to show a connection.

The Decision Beyond Dred Scott

1 In 1857, a Supreme Court ruling turned one man's freedom suit into a national argument. Dred Scott, an enslaved man, had lived with his enslaver in Illinois and the Wisconsin Territory, where slavery was prohibited. He argued that living in those places made him free. Instead, the Court ruled against him in Dred Scott v. Sandford. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney wrote the majority opinion. The justices did more than decide Scott's case: they made sweeping claims about citizenship and the power of Congress over slavery in western territories.

2 The majority said that people of African descent, whether free or enslaved, could not be citizens of the United States under the Constitution as the justices understood it. That meant Scott could not bring his case in federal court as a citizen. The opinion also treated enslaved people as property and said Congress could not ban slavery in federal territories. This struck down the Missouri Compromise's ban on slavery in much of the Louisiana Purchase. The ruling gave slaveholders a powerful argument for taking enslaved people into territories where slavery had been barred.

3 Consider two readers of the decision in 1857. A free Black person might see that the nation's highest court rejected a claim to national citizenship, even for people who were not enslaved. A person who opposed slavery's spread might see Congress lose a tool for keeping it out of federal territories. Supporters of slavery welcomed the decision, while opponents protested it. Their clash sharpened the conflict between North and South before the Civil War. Later, the Fourteenth Amendment declared people born or naturalized in the United States citizens, overturning the decision's citizenship rule.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Court's citizenship ruling affect Scott's ability to seek freedom in federal court?

2. How did the Court's ruling about enslaved people as property affect limits on slavery in federal territories?

3. Why might a free Black person and a slaveholder have reacted differently to the decision?

4. How did the ruling about federal territories add to the conflict between North and South?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four- or five-sentence letter to the editor from the viewpoint of someone in 1857 who opposes slavery's expansion. Explain how the ruling affects both citizenship and slavery in the territories, then argue why those effects matter for the nation's future.

ANSWER KEY

A Ruling's Reach

GRADE 8 · 8.C.11.2.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline two rulings and circle two effects of those rulings. Number one ruling 1 and its effect 2 to show a connection. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Court's citizenship ruling affect Scott's ability to seek freedom in federal court?	**The Court said Scott could not bring his case in federal court as a citizen because, under its ruling, people of African descent could not be U.S. citizens.**
2	How did the Court's ruling about enslaved people as property affect limits on slavery in federal territories?	**The Court said Congress could not ban slavery in federal territories, striking down the Missouri Compromise's ban in much of the Louisiana Purchase.**
3	Why might a free Black person and a slaveholder have reacted differently to the decision?	**A free Black person might object to being denied national citizenship. A slaveholder might welcome the ruling because it supported taking enslaved people into territories where slavery had been barred.**
4	How did the ruling about federal territories add to the conflict between North and South?	**It removed a congressional limit on slavery's spread. Supporters of slavery welcomed that result, while opponents protested it, sharpening the conflict.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

To the editor: The Court has said that even free Black people cannot be citizens of the United States under the Constitution. That ruling shuts Dred Scott out of federal court as a citizen and denies free Black people a place in the nation. By calling enslaved people property, the Court also says Congress cannot keep slavery out of federal territories. The Missouri Compromise's limit is gone, so more territories may face battles over slavery. Our country cannot settle this conflict while its highest court protects slavery's spread.

Accept responses that accurately connect each ruling to an effect described in the passage. For the letter, look for a clear 1857 viewpoint and a reasoned claim about future conflict, not a prediction that war was certain.